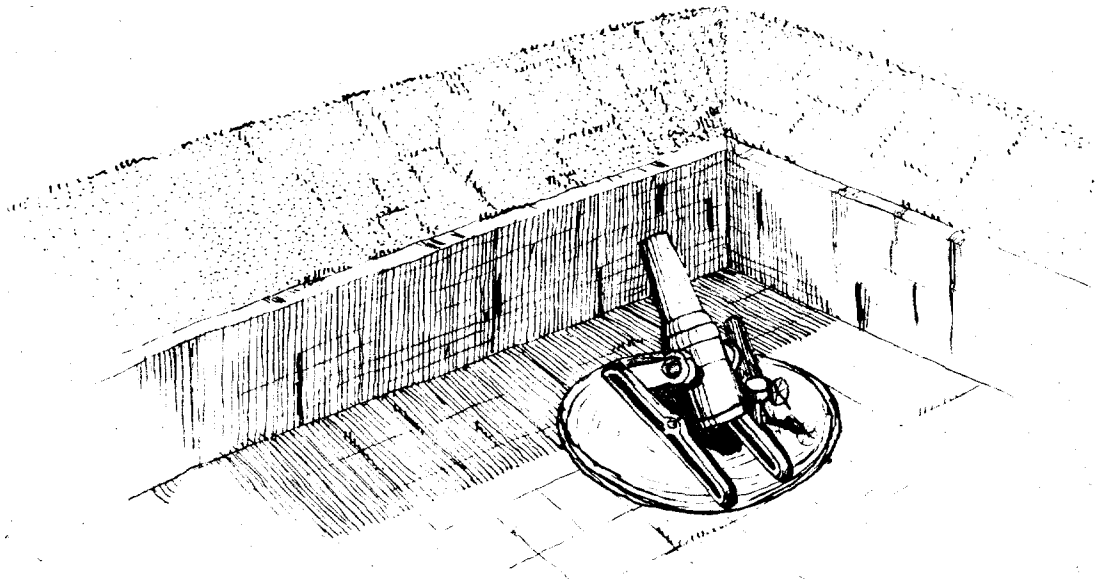


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HISTORIC SITES REPORT



FORT DE SOTO FLORIDA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

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THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

Historic Sites Report

on

FORT DE SOTO PARK

Pinellas County

Florida

by

Frank B. Sarles, Jr.

Historian

February, 1960

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Region One
900 North Lombardy Street
Richmond 20, Virginia

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PREFACE

This report on Fort De Soto, Florida, has been prepared as a part of Theme XXI, Development of the United States to World Power, in the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. The report was authorized by a memorandum from the Director of the National Park Service to the Regional Director, Region One, dated August 26, 1959.

For special assistance in the preparation of this report, I would like to express my appreciation to Representative William C. Cramer, of the First Congressional District of Florida; Mr. A. L. Anderson, Chairman of the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners; Mr. Elmer Krauss, of the Greater St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce; and Mr. C. W. Young, district assistant to Representative Cramer.

F. B. S.

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SITE

Location and Description

Fort De Soto Park occupies the five small islands -- Mullet, Center Mullet, East Mullet, Hospital, and Rattlesnake -- which make up Mullet Key, at the entrance to Tampa Bay in Pinellas County, Florida.¹ The park, containing approximately 884 acres, is located in Sections 5 through 9, 17 and 18 of Township 33 South, Range 16 East of the Principal Meridian of Florida, approximately six miles south of St Petersburg. It is in latitude 27°34' North, longitude 82°54' West.

The park, which comprises the original Fort De Soto Military Reservation, is a unit of the Pinellas County Park System. Four of the islands are undeveloped. Mullet, the largest, is the site of the remains of Fort De Soto and of a group of buildings formerly constituting the United States Public Health Service quarantine station for Tampa Bay. The huge concrete emplacement of Battery Laidley is the only relatively intact component of the fort, although brick foundations, debris and short stretches of brick paving can be found throughout the fort area. Four 12-inch breech-loading mortars, minus breech mechanisms, are mounted in Battery Laidley. The ruins of Battery Bigelow and other debris in the water just off the Gulf shore of the island clearly indicate the extensive erosion which has occurred there.

¹ Originally there was a sixth, North Mullet, which is now a part of Mullet Island.

Some half-dozen buildings remain of the former quarantine station, about a half-mile east of the fort site. A concessionaire operates a cafe and a resort hotel in two of the buildings, and the County maintains a small marine museum in another. The concessionaire has constructed a miniature railroad from the quarantine area to Battery Laidley. All boats dock in the quarantine area, and a small landing strip is located there.

At present, Fort De Soto Park is accessible from the mainland only by boat or private plane. Daily passenger ferry service operates from St. Petersburg and from Pass-a-Grille, with special charter boat service available for larger groups. The concessionaire estimates that between 20,000 and 21,000 persons visited the park in 1958. Local interests have proposed the construction of a semi-circular causeway, the "Pinellas Bayway," from St. Petersburg via Mullet Key to the Sunshine Skyway, a toll road which crosses Tampa Bay from St. Petersburg a short distance east of the park.

Significance of the Area

United States harbors were among the most extensively fortified in the world at the outbreak of the Civil War, but experience in that conflict showed that the existing masonry forts were unable to resist the fire of rifled artillery.² During the next quarter-century, while artillery

² See the article by Lieut. D. P. Kirchner, USN, entitled "American Harbor Defense Forts," in United States Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 84, No. 8 (August, 1958), pp. 93-101.

and warships became even more powerful, little was done to modernize our coastal defenses. Not until 1890 was a new program of fortification undertaken, and it was far from complete at the beginning of the Spanish-American War in 1898.

Of all the lessons taught by that short war, none was more forcefully presented than that involving the value of adequate coastal defenses. When war began, a large part of our Atlantic fleet was immobilized by the public clamor for protection against the Spanish naval expedition of Admiral Cervera. Subsequently the demonstrated inability of our warships to reduce the Spanish coast defenses in the Caribbean proved that "no navy, operating alone far distant from home bases, could successfully attack the United States if it was protected by coast defense guns of caliber equal to those of a hostile fleet."³

For several years the construction of coastal defenses had a high priority, and in 1901 the Coast Artillery was created with the primary mission of manning those defenses. By 1914 our harbors were protected by 75 well-armed forts.

The coastal fortifications of the period after 1890 had several common characteristics evolving from the changed conditions of naval warfare. They consisted of dispersed and carefully hidden batteries. Besides mines and other submarine explosives, the armament included both flat-trajectory and high trajectory weapons of heavy caliber. Guns were mounted on disappearing carriages, and mortars emplaced in deep pits which

³ Department of the Army, American Military History, 1607-1953 (ROTC Manual No. 145-20, 17 July 1956), p. 317.

made them completely invulnerable from the sea. Their elaborate fire control systems were much more accurate than those of warships of the period. No overhead cover was provided for the batteries, on the theory that their heavy and accurate fire would prevent enemy vessels from approaching near enough to damage them.

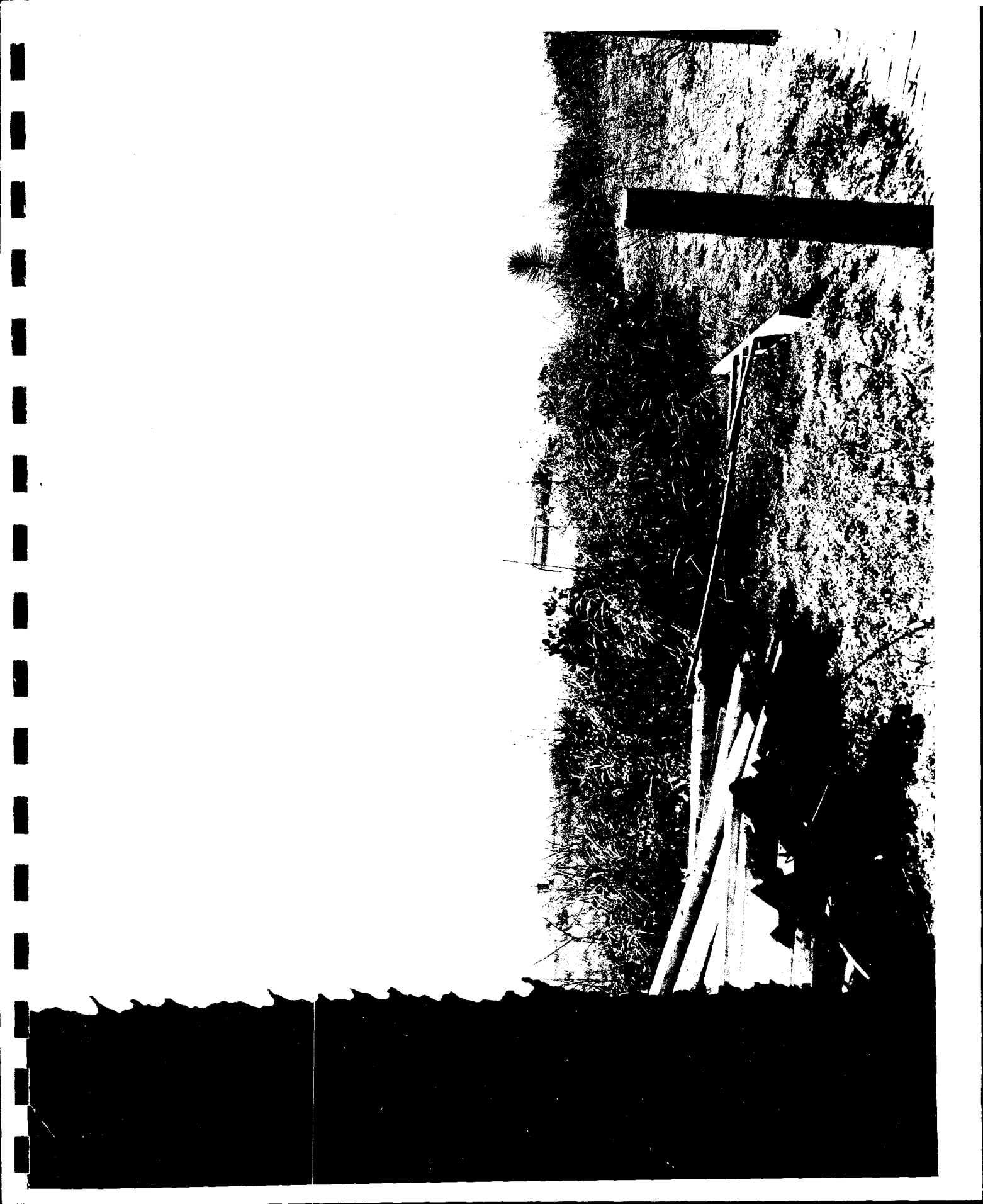
By 1918, the accelerated development of artillery and warships consequent upon the outbreak of World War I had again rendered our coastal defenses obsolete. Developments tending to this effect included improved shipboard fire control devices; redesigned turrets, which allowed warships a higher angle of fire; and improved artillery fuzes which greatly increased the accuracy of overhead bursts.

Before the existing fortifications could be adapted to meet these new threats, the rapid development of military aviation shifted the entire focus of defense. By the time of the Second World War, surface attack against harbor defenses was only a secondary possibility. Most of the outmoded coastal defenses were abandoned between the wars, the last of the big guns was taken out of service shortly after 1945, and the Coast Artillery Corps itself was soon afterward abolished. Though the principle of harbor defense remained the same, the methods of attack and defense had undergone a revolutionary change.

Fort De Soto is one of the coastal defenses built during the quarter-century after 1890. Its story is representative, symbolizing the life cycle of one particular concept of our national defense.

Egmont Key from Battery Laidley. The main ship channel into Tampa Bay passes between the keys, from the Gulf of Mexico in the right background. The ruins of Battery Bigelow are just offshore.

National Park Service photograph
December 16, 1959



Synopsis of the History of Fort De Soto

Egmont and Mullet Keys, flanking the main ship channel into Tampa Bay, were first specifically set aside for military purposes by an executive order of March 23, 1849. Their reservation was made permanent by another order on November 29, 1882.

The two keys remained unfortified for many years, though a lighthouse, built on Egmont Key in 1847, served blockading Union vessels as a look-out station during the Civil War. A number of would-be blockade runners were intercepted nearby.

Egmont Key was hastily fortified at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, and plans were made for permanent works on both keys. On July 30, 1898, an allotment of \$150,000 was made for a 12-inch mortar battery on Mullet Key. Field work began in November and the work was completed in the spring of 1900.

In 1899, the eastern two-thirds of Mullet Island was transferred to the Treasury Department for quarantine purposes. The rest of Mullet Key became the Fort De Soto Military Reservation by General Orders No. 43, War Department, of April 4, 1900, which also gave the name of Fort Dade to that on Egmont Key. On May 9, the mortar battery at Fort De Soto was placed under control of the commanding officer at Fort Dade.

Barracks and quarters were completed at Fort De Soto during 1901, as well as a battery for two 15-pounder rapid-fire guns. The fort was garrisoned by a detachment of the 1st Company, Coast Artillery, until February 5, 1902, when the rest of the company took station there.

Mortars were mounted at Fort De Soto during 1902 and 15-pounder guns the following year. On May 25, 1903, the mortar battery was named Battery Laidley, and the other, Battery Bigelow.

After four years as a sub-post of Fort Dade, De Soto became an independent post on February 10, 1904. Four and a half months later, on June 28, the State of Florida ceded exclusive jurisdiction of the reservation to the United States. On April 12, 1907, Fort De Soto became the temporary headquarters of the Artillery District of Tampa during a construction project at Fort Dade, and it remained an independent post until its inactivation in 1910.

On April 18, 1907, the 1st Company was replaced by the 39th Company as the garrison of the post. In October the newly arrived troops were hosts to elements of the Florida militia in joint coast defense exercises. Similar exercises were held at Fort De Soto in May, 1908, and October, 1909.

Fort De Soto was inactivated on June 8, 1910, with the transfer of its garrison to Fort Morgan, Alabama. A caretaking detachment from Fort Dade maintained it until both posts were abandoned after World War I. Four of De Soto's eight mortars were shipped away early in 1917, and the protective detachment there was increased during the war.

Fort Dade was inactivated on August 31, 1921, and all of its garrison transferred to Key West except a small caretaking detachment.

Both forts were declared surplus to War Department needs in 1922 and put under jurisdiction of the Quartermaster Corps. They were abandoned on May 25, 1923, with a lone civilian caretaker assigned to each. Maintenance funds were scarce and the buildings deteriorated rapidly.

In 1926, Congress authorized the Secretary of War to sell the two reservations. De Soto was appraised at \$192,000, but no satisfactory bids were received when it was offered for sale on April 16, 1928. Fort Dade also failed to bring an acceptable bid.

Shortly afterward, the two reservations were withdrawn from sale pending further study of their military value. In 1931 they were again declared surplus and offered to other Federal agencies. The Department of Agriculture in 1935 secured a permit to administer the five smaller islands of Mullet Key as a migratory bird refuge, and they were transferred to that department on November 10, 1938. Meantime, Fort Dade had been transferred to the Treasury and Commerce departments.

The Mullet Key Quarantine Station operated until 1937, when its activities were transferred to Tampa. The quarantine tract then was sold to the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners, on September 29, 1938.

In October, 1940, the War Department announced plans for the utilization of the Fort De Soto reservation as a bombing range, and on March 22, 1941, it was designated as a sub-post of MacDill Field. The five smaller islands were transferred back to the War Department, which also repurchased the quarantine station tract from Pinellas County.

Disposal of the Mullet Key Bombing Range was authorized by Congress in June, 1948. The property was sold to Pinellas County on August 11.

Identification of the Site

No question exists as to the proper identification of the site. Mullet Key has undergone no significant alteration in size or configuration since it was surveyed in 1876, and the fort site is amply authenticated by documentary material and maps, as well as by the physical evidence provided by Battery Laidley and the surface remains of its other component parts.

DOCUMENTED HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Early History of Mullet Key

The documented military history of Mullet Key dates from March 23, 1849, when it was reserved from sale, "until the completion of the surveys necessary for the required defenses," by executive order, along with Egmont, Barnaby, and Long Island in Tampa Bay, and other islands along the Florida coast.¹ During the preceding January, the Board of Engineers for the Atlantic Coast Defenses had been sent to make a field study of the Florida coastal islands, all of which had previously been included in a blanket reservation from public sale.² On May 2, 1850, the officials of the General Land Office in Florida were instructed to protect the reserved islands from interference in the subsequent survey and disposal of public lands in that state.³

¹ Secretary of War George W. Crawford to Commissioner R. W. Young, General Land Office, March 23, 1849, with enclosures. (Typewritten copy in Abandoned-military-reservations, Florida, Fort De Soto.) Record Group 49 (General Land Office), National Archives.

² Ibid.; Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography (4 vols., New York, 1936), Vol. I, pp. 302-05. The Board consisted of Lieut. Col. R. E. De Russy, Maj. R. Delafield, Brevet Col. J. K. Mansfield, and Brevet Col. R. E. Lee.

³ Commissioner Joseph S. Wilson, General Land Office, to Gen. A. A. Humphreys, Chief of Engineers, November 16, 1870 (Land Papers, Florida, Brooke and Tampa Bay). Record Group 77 (Office of the Chief of Engineers), National Archives.

Despite the strategic location of Egmont and Mullet Keys, no attempt was made to fortify them after the 1849 reservation. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Florida troops made no serious attempt to occupy the two keys, but withdrew to Tampa after removing the lanterns, machinery, and other equipment from the lighthouse on Egmont Key.⁴ By July 15, 1861, vessels of the Union blockading fleet were using the lighthouse as a lookout.⁵ A number of blockade runners were captured nearby during the course of the war,⁶ and in May, 1864, the blockading vessel U. S. S. Sunflower cooperated with a combined Union expedition from Key West under Brig. Gen. Daniel P. Woodbury, which seized Tampa temporarily.⁷

Permanent Reservation

The continued reservation of Mullet Key for the defense of Tampa Bay was recommended by the Board of Engineers for Fortifications on June 18, 1868,⁸ but it was nearly eight years before the key was finally surveyed,

⁴ Richard Rush, et al., eds., Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (30 vols., Washington, D. C., 1894-1914), Ser. I, Vol. 17, p. 85. During the temporary occupation of Tampa in 1864, Union troops found a part of the lighthouse equipment, but no trace of the lens; ibid., Vol. 35, Pt. 2, pp. 389, 391. The lighthouse reservation was made on August 21, 1847; Secretary of Interior to Secretary of War, September 12, 1882, with enclosures (Land Papers, Florida, General, St. Augustine: 1-25). RG 77.

⁵ Official Records (Navy), Ser. I, Vol. 16, p. 591.

⁶ See ibid., Vol. 17, pp. 67-8, 84, 351, 415, 439, 464, 615.

⁷ Ibid., Vol. 35, Pt. 2, pp. 389, 391.

⁸ Extract from Proceedings of Board of Engineers for Fortifications June 18th 1868 (Land Papers, Florida, Brooke and Tampa Bay). RG 77.

in January, 1876.⁹ The following year, the question of a final disposition of the military reservations in Florida was raised by the Department of the Interior and was referred to the Board of Engineers. On December 21, 1877, the Board recommended that Egmont and Mullet Keys be retained as sites for batteries to cover the two main ship channels into Tampa Bay. The reservation of those two keys was made permanent in an executive order of November 17, 1882, and promulgated in General Orders No. 10, Headquarters Corps of Engineers, dated November 29.¹⁰

Had Mullet Key not been retained by the War Department, it probably would have become a deep-water terminus for Peter Demens' Orange Belt Line railroad, which reached St. Petersburg in 1888. On October 8, 1885, Thomas C. Hoge of New York City wrote the Secretary of War requesting that Mullet Key be turned over to the Department of the Interior for public sale; if that were not possible, Hoge stated, he would ask the grant of a right-of-way on the key for the railroad he represented, together with a donation of land for depots and other facilities suitable for the railway terminus. To this, the Secretary replied that Mullet Key was still

⁹ [Tampa Bay. Mullet Key.] Township No. 33 South Range No. 16 East (Drawer 128, Sheet 43). Cartographic Records Division, National Archives. See Map Appendix 1.

¹⁰ Secretary of War to the Adjutant General, October 14, 1885 (Land Papers, Florida, Brooke and Tampa Bay). RG 77. Though the executive order of 1882 described the area as "The whole of Mullet Island," the War Department considered that it encompassed the six islands making up Mullet Key; Assistant Quartermaster General to the Adjutant General, February 17, 1930 (Decimal File 602.6, C-R, Fort De Soto). Record Group 92 (Office of the Quartermaster General), National Archives. See Map Appendix 2.

required for defensive purposes, and that only Congress could authorize the grant of a right-of-way.¹¹

That same year, Congress created the Board on Fortifications and Other Defenses which was destined to work out a comprehensive plan of coastal defense, and which soon became known as the Endicott Board, after Secretary of War William C. Endicott.¹² The Board adopted a comprehensive plan of coastal defense fortification, calling for the eventual expenditure of more than \$100,000,000. The work began in 1890 and was carried on by regular annual appropriations in succeeding years.¹³

Fort De Soto, 1898-1910

On June 7, 1898, the Chief of Engineers instructed Lt. Col. W. H. H. Benyaurd, district engineer in St. Augustine, to prepare plans for a battery of eight 12-inch mortars proposed for construction on Mullet Key. Cost of the battery was to be allotted from the appropriation for "Guns and Mortar Batteries" enacted on May 7, 1898.¹⁴

¹¹ Secretary of War William C. Endicott to Thomas C. Hoge, October 24, 1885 (Land Papers, Florida, Brooke and Tampa Bay). RG 77.

¹² Claude M. Fuess, "William Crowninshield Endicott," Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols., New York, 1928-44), Vol. VI, p. 159.

¹³ Elihu Root, The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States: Addresses and Reports (Cambridge, 1916), p. 366; also see Kirchner, loc. cit., p. 94.

¹⁴ Annual Report, Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla., 1899 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77. At the outbreak of war temporary batteries were erected on Egmont Key for two 8-inch rifled guns and two 6-inch rapid-fire guns; Battery Egmont & Mullet Key Fort, Armament Sheet, Dec. 31, 1898 (Drawer 254, Sheet 18-3). Cartographic Records Division, National Archives.

On July 25, Benyaurd submitted plans for a battery to be located on the southwest point of Mullet Island, facing slightly south of due west. There was, he pointed out, "no choice of a site for a battery so far as points of elevation are concerned"; but the site chosen was that best calculated to cover the main ship channel. Since the heaviest fire could be expected from the seaward approach, Benyaurd's plan called for a greater than normal thickness of walls and earthwork on that side of the magazines. He estimated that the battery would cost \$200,000.¹⁵

Benyaurd's plan was approved in Washington on July 30, 1898. The Chief of Engineers, however -- noting a current tendency toward a reduction in the caliber of ship armament -- proposed a reduction in the relief of the profile of the battery and appropriated \$150,000 for its construction.¹⁶

Construction of Mortar Battery

Field work began in November, with construction of a 275-foot wharf on the south side of Mullet Island, and in December the work of clearing the battery site began.¹⁷ By March, 1899, the construction plant was nearly completed. It consisted of stone bins, cement shed and concrete mixer, just south of the battery site; a narrow-gauge railway from the wharf to the storage facilities, with a spur line to a shell bank west of the battery site;

¹⁵ Benyaurd to Chief of Engineers, July 25, 1898 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77. See Map Appendices 3 and 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Annual Report, Tampa Bay, 1899.

and an overhead cableway for depositing materials, which Benyaurd had obtained from Santa Rosa Island. An office, stables, quarters for workmen and a messhall also had been constructed. The battery had been staked out, the forms for foundations of platforms and walls were in place, and some 8,000 barrels of cement and 1,000 cubic yards of shell were in storage.¹⁸ Everything was in readiness for pouring the foundations -- except that the stone had not arrived. In the absence of stone the foundation mix consisted of cement, sand and shell, but the additional ingredient was used in all subsequent concrete work.

Both the stone and the cement were being brought from New York and New Jersey by sailing vessel, subject to the vicissitudes of wind and tide. The failure of the contractors to deliver those commodities according to contract caused "a period of comparative idleness" followed by "a congestion of stone greatly overtaxing the available storage room." The first load of stone arrived on May 31, 1899, and three more shiploads came within the next ten days. To compound the difficulty the supply of cement was exhausted shortly after the stone began arriving and the latter had to be piled helter-skelter, which necessitated costly rehandling.¹⁹

By June 30, concrete forms had been built and I-beams set for the north half of the battery, and concrete had been poured nearly to the level

¹⁸ Capt Joseph E. Kuhn to Chief of Engineers, March 14, 1899 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77. See Map Appendix 5.

¹⁹ Annual Report, Tampa Bay, 1899. One schooner, loaded with 4,000 barrels of cement, took 50 days for the voyage from New York.

of the magazine roof. All gun beds had been completed and anchor bolts set to receive the base rings. Nearly half of the \$150,000 appropriation had been obligated.²⁰

Work was substantially completed on the mortar battery by the end of 1899. All concrete work was poured; 42,000 of an estimated 72,000 yards of sand fill were in place; the waterproofing course was completed; and the eight mortar carriages had been received and mounted. All that remained was completion of the sand fill, installation of electric apparatus, and placing of the topside observing stations and access stairs. An additional allotment of \$5,000 to complete the battery was made on December 23.²¹

Capt. Thomas H. Rees, engineer officer in charge of construction, requested a further allotment of \$3,115.67 on February 20, 1900, suggesting as an alternative that the height of the parapets and traverses could be cut. He was authorized to make the cut, from 32 to 27 feet. Work progressed rapidly after that and, on May 10, Captain Rees was able to report completion of the battery, with an available balance of \$16.73²² from the \$155,000 allotment.

Though complete, the battery remained unarmed for over two years. Four of the mortars were mounted in May and June, 1902, and the others during July and August.²³ Even then the mortars were not operative, for the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Capt. Henry Jervey to Chief of Engineers, December 20, 1899 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77.

²² Rees to Chief of Engineers, February 20, 1900; same to same, May 10, 1900 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77. See Map Appendix 6.

²³ Annual Report, Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla., 1902 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77.

Two of the four 12-inch mortars at Battery
Laidley. Note that breech mechanisms are
missing.

National Park Service photograph
December 16, 1959



obturators, "with the new electrical firing device," were in storage awaiting the arrival of ordnance mechanics to assemble them to the breech blocks.²⁴ Eventually the requisite assembly was accomplished, and the mortars were test-fired on November 19-20, 1903.²⁵

By General Orders No. 78, Adjutant General's Office, dated May 25, 1903, the mortar battery was christened Battery Laidley. It was so named in honor of Col. Theodore T. S. Laidley, Ordnance Department, U. S. Army, who "rendered conspicuous service in the war with Mexico and the Civil War, and who died April 4, 1886, at Palatka, Florida."²⁶

Construction of Gun Battery

After completion of the mortar battery, funds were allotted for construction of a battery for two 15-pounder rapid-fire guns. Work was carried forward on the battery during 1901, and by the end of the year it was complete except for the base castings, which had not been received. The gun battery was completed early in 1902, but as was the case with Battery Laidley, it remained unarmed for some time after completion.²⁷ Two 15-pounder

²⁴ Inspection report by Capt. Oscar Straub, December 31, 1902 (Document File). Record Group 94 (Adjutant General's Office), National Archives.

²⁵ Post return for November, 1903 (Post Returns, Fort De Soto, Fla., 1902-1914). RG 94.

²⁶ Copy of General Orders No. 78 (Document File). RG 94.

²⁷ Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla. Battery Egmont and Mullet Keys. Forts Dade and De Soto. Armament Sheet, Dec. 31, 1900 (Drawer 254, Sheet 18-11); Defenses of Tampa, Fla. Armament Report for Year Ending December 31, 1901. Fort De Soto, Florida (Drawer 254, Sheet 20-5); Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla. Armament Report for Year Ending December 31, 1902. Fort De Soto, Florida (Drawer 254, Sheet 20-8). Cartographic Records Division, National Archives. See Map Appendix 7.

Driggs-Seabury rapid-fire guns were mounted during 1903 and were test-fired along with the mortars in November of that year.²⁸

The General Order of May 25, 1903, which named Battery Laidley also announced the naming of the gun battery. It became Battery Bigelow in honor of 1st Lt. Aaron Bigelow, of the 21st U. S. Infantry, who was killed at the battle of Lundy's Lane, Ontario, on July 25, 1814.²⁹

Other Construction

Construction of post buildings began early in 1900, and by mid-year quarters had been virtually completed for three officers, two non-commissioned officers and a hospital steward.³⁰ A 100-foot barracks was erected by the spring of 1901, and at the end of that year eight more structures were finished, including a hospital, storehouse, shop for blacksmith and carpenter work, stable, guardhouse, administration building, mess hall and kitchen, and bakehouse. All buildings were of wood, with slate roofs.³¹ By 1906, when engineer work at the post was completed, 29 buildings had been

²⁸ Inspection report by Brig. Gen. T. H. Barry, Commanding the Department of the Gulf, March 1, 1904 (Document File); Post return for November, 1903 (Post Returns, Fort De Soto, Fla., 1902-1914). RG 94.

²⁹ General Order 78, Adjutant General's Office, May 25, 1903 (Document File). RG 94.

³⁰ By contract dated June 21, 1900, the firm of Washington and Verdier agreed to wire the quarters and to construct a barracks, a guard house, a bake house, and a shop building. (Document File, 1800-1914). RG 92.

³¹ Inspection report by Maj. Gen. John R. Brooke, Commanding Department of the East, April 29, 1901; Description of Post at Fort De Soto, Fla., December 17, 1901 (Document File). RG 94.

LEGEND.

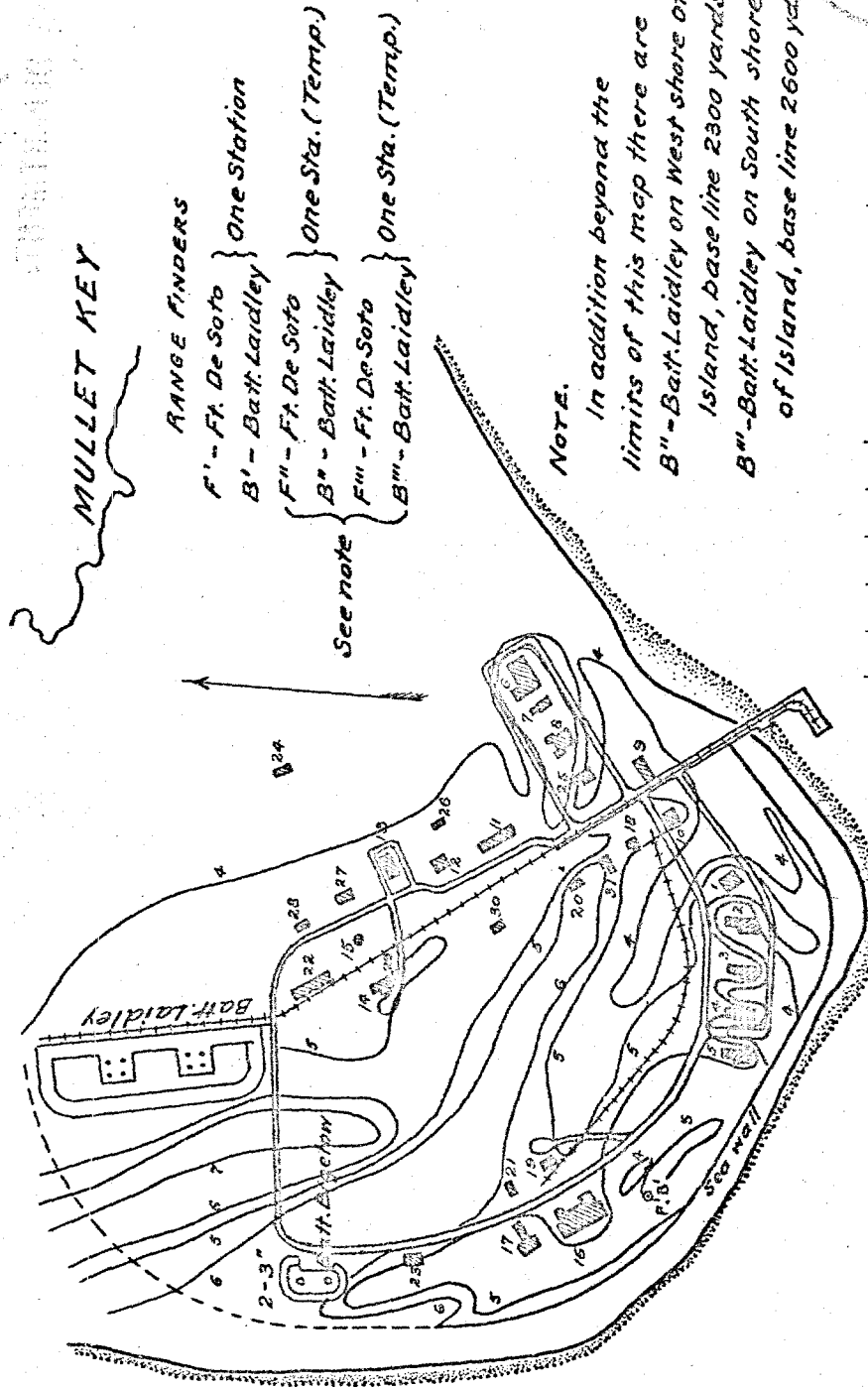
- 1 Administration
- 2 Officers Quarters
- 3 " "
- 4 " "
- 5 " "
- 6 Hospital
- 7 Hosp. Stds. Qrs.
- 8 N.C.S. Qrs.
- 9 Warehouse
- 10 Guard House
- 11 Gr. M. & Comm. St. Ho.
- 12 Shop
- 13 Stable
- 14 Pump House
- 15 60,000 gal. tank
- 16 Barracks
- 17 Mess Hall
- 18 Civilian Qrs.
- 19 Lavatory
- 20 Bake House
- 21 Fire apparatus Ho.
- 22 Cement Shed.
- 23 Post Exchange
- 24 Oil House
- 25 N.C.S. Qrs.
- 26 Temporary Bdg.
- 27 Wagon shed
- 28 Ordnance St. Ho.
- 29 Search Lt. shelter
- 30 Old Post Exch.
- 31 Civilian Qrs.

BATTERIES

Laidley 8-12" M.

Bigelow 2-3" B.P.

FORT DE SOTO.



MULLET KEY

RANGE FINDERS

- F'* - Ft. De Soto } One Station
B' - Batt. Laidley }
F'' - Ft. De Soto } One Sta. (Temp.)
B'' - Batt. Laidley }
F''' - Ft. De Soto } One Sta. (Temp.)
B''' - Batt. Laidley }
- See note

NOTE.

In addition beyond the limits of this map there are
B'' - Batt. Laidley on West shore of Island, base line 2300 yards.
B''' - Batt. Laidley on South shore of Island, base line 2600 yds.



Fort De Soto in 1906

190-3

erected at a cost of \$120,674.55, excluding the cost of water and sewerage systems.³²

Long before the construction program was complete, a question was raised as to whether or not some of the buildings were improperly located. Maj. Gen. John R. Brooke, commanding general of the Department of the East, after an inspection in the spring of 1901 stated that the barracks and officers' quarters were too close to the shore fronting the main channel. He called it an "exceedingly objectionable" location -- a judgment which was subsequently vindicated.³³

In 1903 his successor, Maj. Gen. Adna R. Chaffee, found the quarters and barracks "much superior" to those at Fort Dade on Egmont Key, the post in general "smaller and better kept," and the command "well instructed and well disciplined." For the rest, he found mostly lack:

No system of fire control. No vertical position finder. . . . No horizontal base equipped. No platform lights. No search lights. No mining case-mate. No mining material.³⁴ No torpedo instruction. No telephone booths. . . .

Those needs were eventually met or compensated for, as were others not mentioned by General Chaffee. The earliest and most serious shortage was in the water supply, a circumstance which forbade the stationing of a

³² Maj. M. D. Wheeler, Asst. Q. M., to W. J. Warrington, secretary of St. Petersburg Realty Board, July 19, 1926 (Decimal File 602.2-K-RD, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

³³ Inspection report, April 29, 1901 (Document File). RG 94.

³⁴ Inspection report, April 16, 1903 (Document File). RG 94.

full garrison at the post until 1902.³⁵ Not so serious, but undoubtedly inconvenient to the garrison, was a lack of roads and walks. Prior to 1905, an attempt was made to utilize shell for the purpose, but the small shells available did not pack satisfactorily in the soft sand.³⁶ The problem finally was solved by the use of brick paving. More attention to aesthetics was urged by one inspecting officer, who said that efforts should be made to cultivate grass and shade trees on the post.³⁷

Quarantine Station

On December 16, 1889, the Hillsboro County Board of Health was granted a license to maintain a quarantine station on Mullet Key.³⁸ The Secretary of the Treasury, on May 2, 1899, applied for transfer of the eastern end of Mullet Island to his jurisdiction for quarantine purposes, and the transfer of 271 acres was effected on May 15.³⁹

During 1900, four buildings were removed from a Marine Hospital Service detention camp on Egmont Key and rebuilt on the Mullet Island tract, which already contained a cottage and sanitary facilities. On August 1, 1901, the Marine Hospital Service took over jurisdiction of the quarantine station from the Florida State Board of Health.⁴⁰

³⁵ Description of Post at Fort De Soto, Fla., December 17, 1901 (Document File). RG 94.

³⁶ Inspection report by Deputy Q. M. Gen. Sam R. Jones, December 10, 1904 (Document File, 1800-1914). RG 92.

³⁷ Inspection report by General Barry, March 1, 1904 (Document File). RG 94.

³⁸ Commanding Officer, Harbor Defenses of Pensacola, to Commanding General, 4th Corps Area, June 2, 1934 (Decimal File 680.44, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

³⁹ Secretary of the Treasury to the Secretary of War, May 22, 1900 (Document File). RG 94.

⁴⁰ Annual Report of the Surgeon-General of the Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1902 (Washington, D. C., 1903), p. 421.

Administration of Fort De Soto

By General Orders No. 43, War Department, dated April 4, 1900, the remaining 613 acres of Mullet Key received the name of Fort De Soto, "in honor of Fernando De Soto, the Spanish explorer who, commissioned by the King of Spain to undertake the conquest of Florida, landed May 25, 1539, and after lengthy wanderings and bitter disappointments, died and was buried in the waters of the Mississippi."⁴¹ De Soto officially became a sub-post of Fort Dade on May 9, when jurisdiction of the mortar battery was transferred from the Corps of Engineers to the commanding officer at Dade.⁴²

Fort De Soto remained a sub-post of Fort Dade until February 10, 1904. By the provisions of Special Orders No. 14, Headquarters Department of the Gulf, of that date, it was constituted an independent post.⁴³

During the first years of its existence, Fort De Soto was under the concurrent jurisdiction of the Federal Government and the State of Florida. By a proclamation of June 28, 1904, the Governor of Florida ceded exclusive jurisdiction over the military reservation to the United States.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Outline Index, Military Forts and Stations, Vol. D, p. 105. (In Old War Records Office, National Archives.)

⁴² Capt. Thomas H. Rees to Chief of Engineers, May 9, 1900 (Document File, 1894-1923), RG 77.

⁴³ Post return for February, 1904 (Post Returns, Fort De Soto, Fla., 1902-1914). RG 94.

⁴⁴ Office of the Judge Advocate General, United States Military Reservations, National Cemeteries and Military Parks (Rev. ed., Washington, D. C., 1910), p. 48.

Under the provisions of General Orders No. 72, War Department, on April 3, 1907, Forts Dade and De Soto were constituted as the Artillery District of Tampa. Nine days later, by General Orders No. 86, Fort De Soto became the temporary headquarters of the district, pending the completion of "certain construction work" at Fort Dade.⁴⁵ De Soto's independent status came to an end on June 2, 1910, when its garrison was relieved from duty and it once again became a sub-post of Fort Dade.⁴⁶

Garrison Life

Soon after its establishment in 1900, Fort De Soto was garrisoned by a detachment of Company A, 1st Artillery; on the reorganization of the artillery in 1901, that company became the 1st Company, Coast Artillery.⁴⁷ The remainder of the 1st Company took station at the fort on February 5, 1902. On April 18, 1907, the 1st Company was replaced by the 39th Company, Coast Artillery, which continued to garrison Fort De Soto until June 8, 1910.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ General Orders Nos. 72 and 86, War Department, 1907 (Document File). RG 94.

⁴⁶ General Orders No. 101, War Department, June 2, 1910 (Document File). RG 94.

⁴⁷ Lieut. W. E. Smith of Company A, 1st Artillery, was commanding at Fort De Soto in May, 1900; Secretary of Treasury to Secretary of War, May 22, 1900 (Document File). RG 94. An Act of February 2, 1901, constituted the Artillery Corps in the line of the Army, comprising the Field Artillery and the Coast Artillery; The Army Almanac: A Book of Facts Concerning the Army of the United States (Washington, D. C., 1950), p. 270.

⁴⁸ Post returns for February, 1902; April, 1907; and June, 1910 (Post Returns, Fort De Soto, Fla., 1902-1914). RG 94.

There is little doubt that every member of the garrison at Fort De Soto looked forward to the day he would transfer out. Living conditions on Mullet Key were far from pleasant. General Brooke, during his 1901 inspection, noted:

It is found that very few Artillery men re-enlist at these southern stations, indicating that they are not comfortable or desirable for the soldiers. Too much stress cannot be laid upon the desirability of having these lonely and remote places as comfortable and attractive as possible to their garrisons.⁴⁹

Isolation was one factor which, desirable as it may have been in the prevention of absence without leave, nevertheless contributed much to the unpopularity of Fort De Soto as a duty station. There was no telephone communication with the mainland, and only the single daily boat provided a link with the outside world.⁵⁰

The baleful influence of isolation was compounded by the lack of recreational facilities at Fort De Soto. Prior to the construction of brick walks, the garrison had little opportunity to indulge in even that simple form of exercise. The commander of the Department of the Gulf, Brig. Gen. T. H. Barry, recommended after an inspection in 1904 that the sale of beer and light wines be permitted in the post exchange to add to the "contentment and discipline" of the garrison.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Inspection report by General Brooke, April 29, 1901 (Document File). RG 94.

⁵⁰ Description of Post of Fort De Soto, Fla., December 17, 1901 (Document File). RG 94.

⁵¹ Inspection report by General Barry, March 1, 1904 (Document File). RG 94.

The lovely sand beaches which fringe Mullet Key would have provided one desirable form of recreation for the men had it not been for the presence of hordes of mosquitoes. The situation in this respect was graphically presented in 1908 by the post quartermaster:

The suffering of the men daily while at work or drill has been greater than can be imagined by any who have not actually experienced it. There have been many nights that the men have had no sleep due to the mosquitoes in quarters, even though mosquito bars are used At present life for the men is a torture both night and day and the mosquitoes have to be fought with a bush continuously whether at work or resting.⁵²

An indorsement by the post commander on the same document indicated that mosquito control was a major problem:

The subject of mosquito extermination has engaged my attention from the first day of my arrival at this post. While all has been done in this direction that the means available have permitted, I agree . . . that a great deal more must be done if life at this post is to be made reasonably bearable during the prevalence of this pest. Within the past month the suffering undergone . . . by every member of the garrison, despite the screened quarters and mosquito sic bar protected beds, is inconceivable to those who have not actually undergone the experience.⁵³

The chief surgeon of the Department of the Gulf summed the matter up succinctly in his own indorsement: "If this post is to continue as a station, life for those concerned should be, at least, made bearable."⁵⁴

⁵² Post Quartermaster, Fort De Soto, to Post Commander, July 16, 1908 (Document File, 1800-1914). RG 92.

⁵³ Indorsement by Post Commander, July 17, 1908, on ibid.

⁵⁴ Indorsement by Chief Surgeon, Department of the Gulf, July 22, 1908, on ibid.

Many a private, writhing under the incessant attacks, must have echoed this sentiment; but it was many years after Fort De Soto had ceased to be an active post before the mosquito problem was solved on Mullet Key.

Joint Maneuvers

The Act of February 2, 1901, which created the Coast Artillery, provided for only a small number of regular artillerymen to man the coastal defenses. The reasoning behind this action, as enunciated by the Secretary of War in 1902, was that manning the coastal fortifications was "constitutional militia work" in which state forces could supplement the regular troops should invasion threaten.⁵⁵ In accordance with this concept, joint maneuvers were held from time to time after 1902, which "helped to create a better integrated, more harmonious defense force, capable of immediate participation in a major conflict."⁵⁶

Fort De Soto was the scene of three of these joint maneuvers, which doubtless brought to its garrison a welcome relief from routine. Elements of the 1st and 2nd Infantry, Florida State Troops, participated in the first maneuvers, October 19-29, 1907, and the second, May 21-31, 1908. The third and last maneuvers, held October 5-17, 1909, saw the Florida Infantry replaced by the 1st Company, Coast Artillery Corps, National Guard of Florida.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Root, op. cit., p. 451.

⁵⁶ American Military History, p. 323.

⁵⁷ Post returns for October, 1907; May, 1908; and October, 1909 (Post Returns, Fort De Soto, Fla., 1902-1914). RG 94.

Less than eight months after the end of these last maneuvers, the Fort De Soto garrison was transferred to Fort Morgan, Alabama, and the fort became an inactive sub-post of Fort Dade, with a caretaker detachment in charge.⁵⁸ Its greatest days were over.

Fort De Soto, 1910-1948

When the 39th Company left Fort De Soto on June 8, 1910, the post was left in charge of a caretaking detachment from the 111th and 116th Companies, which were stationed at Fort Dade. By September of 1914, a solitary ordnance sergeant was on duty at De Soto, and the reservation appears to have been used principally as a hunting preserve by the Fort Dade garrison.⁵⁹

The lone ordnance sergeant was not the only resident of Fort De Soto in 1914, however. On March 4, 1913, Congress had authorized the Department of Agriculture to adopt suitable regulations and to fix closed seasons for migratory game and insectivorous birds according to zones, authorizing the Department to employ inspectors and to appoint wardens from among the State forces to enforce the regulations.⁶⁰ On July 13, 1913, the Secretary of Agriculture sought from the Secretary of War permission for

⁵⁸ General Orders No. 101, War Department, June 2, 1910 (Document File). RG 94.

⁵⁹ Post returns for June, 1910, and September, 1914 (Post Returns, Fort De Soto, Fla., 1902-1914). RG 94. 1st Lieut. A. G. Gillespie, CAC, A Guide to Coast Artillery Posts (Walworth, Wis., 1915).

⁶⁰ Report of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1913 (Washington, D. C., 1913).

use of one of the De Soto buildings as a residence by Warden Asa N. Pillsbury, of the Tampa Bay Group of bird sanctuaries, which permission was granted on August 20.⁶¹

In January, 1917, the caretaking detachment at Fort De Soto consisted of one non-commissioned officer and eight privates. An additional non-commissioned officer and eleven privates were detailed to the post during the first months of 1917 to dismount and prepare four mortars for shipment. During World War I, the caretaking detachment was increased, reaching a maximum of two officers, two non-commissioned officers and 22 privates in October, 1917.⁶²

Deterioration at the inactive post appears to have been rather rapid despite the presence of the caretaking detachment. Repair of the buildings in 1919 required the expenditure of \$25,000.⁶³ Two years later despite long-continued efforts at erosion control, the Post Exchange building was sold because of the undermining of its foundations by wave action,

⁶¹ Secretary of Agriculture to Secretary of War, July 13, 1913; Secretary of War to Secretary of Agriculture, August 20, 1913 (Document File). RG 94. Pillsbury occupied Building No. 18 intermittently until his resignation in 1922; though none of his successors lived at Fort De Soto, the permit of 1913 was not revoked until 1933. Secretary of Agriculture to Secretary of War, July 16, 1921 (Decimal File 680.41, Fort De Soto); same to same, November 6, 1933 (Decimal File 680.44, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

⁶² Post returns, Fort Dade, 1917-18 (Returns, Coastal Defenses of Tampa, Fort Dade, Fla., 1921-23). Record Group 98 (Records of United States Army Commands), National Archives. The Fort Dade garrison in 1917 consisted of the 1st through the 4th companies, Coast Artillery, and, in 1918, the 1st through the 6th companies, with attached units.

⁶³ Maj. M. D. Wheeler, Asst. Q. M., to W. J. Warrington, secretary of St. Petersburg Realty Board, July 19, 1926 (Decimal File 602.2-K-RD, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

which had partly washed away the barracks and mess hall foundations as well.⁶⁴

Abandonment of Fort De Soto

On August 31, 1921, Fort Dade was inactivated, and all personnel except an 18-man caretaking detachment were transferred to Key West.⁶⁵ Both forts were declared surplus on September 16, 1922, and placed under control of the Quartermaster Corps, and on November 7 the Assistant Quartermaster General recommended that they be restored to the Department of the Interior for disposal.⁶⁶ On May 25, 1923, the forts were closed out and abandoned, with a lone caretaker left at each.⁶⁷

The reasons for abandonment of Forts Dade and De Soto were set forth in a letter of the Secretary of War to the Governor of Florida on November 23, 1922:

⁶⁴ Commanding Officer, Fort Dade, to Commanding Officer, Atlanta General Intermediate Depot, January 10, 1922 (Decimal File 680.41, Fort De Soto). RG 92. The direct cause of the undermining of those foundations was a hurricane in October, 1921, but serious erosion difficulties had been encountered at least as early as 1914; Lieut. Col. W. B. Ladue to Chief of Engineers, January 6, 1917 (Document File, 1894-1923). RG 77.

⁶⁵ Post return, Fort Dade, August, 1921 (Returns, Coastal Defenses of Tampa, Fort Dade, Fla., 1921-23). RG 98.

⁶⁶ Assistant Quartermaster General to The Adjutant General, November 7, 1922 (Decimal File 680.41, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

⁶⁷ Post return, Fort Dade, May, 1923 (Returns, Coastal Defenses of Tampa, Fort Dade, Fla., 1921-23). RG 98.

Modern developments in armament required considerable modifications in our coastal defense plans and the defense of much of our coast line can now be better accomplished . . . by utilizing mobile artillery instead of fixed armament. The maintenance of Forts Dade and De Soto is not now essential to the coast defense, and sufficient mobile artillery is available to protect . . . Tampa

The limited personnel for Coast Artillery purposes, the question of future appropriations and the damage wrought . . . by the severe storm in October, 1921 . . . were also considerations. . . .⁶⁸

Deterioration

After Fort De Soto was abandoned, the efforts of one caretaker had little effect on the rapid deterioration of the post. The annual inspection reports are replete with such phrases as "deplorable condition," "decay and ruin," "beyond repair," and with suggestions that the buildings be demolished and the caretaker removed.⁶⁹ To the normal effects of tide and wind were added those of hurricanes on September 18, 1926, and September 4, 1935. The 1926 storm destroyed two small buildings, and its accompanying wave action undermined a small plotting house, while most of the remaining buildings suffered damage to roofs and windows.⁷⁰ Damage from the later storm was not so extensive, but the buildings by that time were so badly

⁶⁸ Secretary of War to Governor of Florida, November 23, 1922 (Decimal File 332.72, Fort Dade). RG 92.

⁶⁹ Inspection report by Maj. Rollin L. Tilton, Asst. Insp., January 30, 1925; same, February 24, 1927; same, September 27, 1927; inspection report by Lieut. Col. C. A. Bach, Asst. Insp., January 22, 1929; inspection report by Col. H. S. Wagner, Insp., February 3, 1930; inspection report by Col. C. A. Bach, Insp. Gen., February 6, 1931. (Decimal File 333.1, Forts Dade and De Soto.) RG 92.

⁷⁰ Caretaker Milton Caldwell to Quartermaster, Fourth Corps Area, October 1, 1926 (Decimal File 600.972, Fort De Soto.) RG 92.

deteriorated that any damage at all approximated complete ruin.⁷¹ As late as October, 1932, all but three of the original 29 post buildings still were standing, though their average value was estimated at only \$250, or a total of \$6,500 out of an original outlay of over \$120,000.⁷²

The batteries also had suffered from the elements. Battery Bigelow was in the path of destructive wave action. By 1930, the west end had collapsed, and the entire battery had toppled into the water by October, 1932.⁷³ Battery Laidley was far enough inland to escape a similar fate, but as early as 1927 the mortar carriages and emplacement iron work were badly rusted; the mortar wells were full of water, which partially covered the counter recoil springs; and it was "extremely doubtful whether . . . this battery will ever again be of any value."⁷⁴ The mortars had been coated with white lead and were in satisfactory condition, and their breech mechanisms had been removed to the Aberdeen Proving Ground.⁷⁵ In late 1929 the mortars were greased and slushed, and water was pumped from the mortar wells,

⁷¹ Coast Guard Lieutenant Commander (Commanding NEMESIS) to Acting Quartermaster, Fort Barrancas, September 13, 1935 (Decimal File 600.972, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

⁷² Memorandum re Fort De Soto, Fla., Apr. 26, 1935, in Fort De Soto file, Branch of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior Building.

⁷³ Ibid.; inspection report by Col. H. S. Wagner, Insp., February 3, 1930 (Decimal File 333.1, Forts Dade and De Soto.) RG 92.

⁷⁴ Inspection report by Maj. Rollin L. Tilton, Asst. Insp., September 27, 1927 (Decimal File 333.1, Forts Dade and De Soto). RG 92.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Erosion along the Gulf shore of Mullet Island.
The view is north from the southwest tip of the
island, showing the ruins of Battery Bigelow in
the left background and the parapet of Battery
Laidley in the right background. Foundations of
the barracks are visible along the water line.

National Park Service photograph
December 16, 1959



by a detachment from the Harbor Defenses of Pensacola. Additional maintenance work was done the following year, and all movable parts were stored in the magazines.⁷⁶

Disposal Authorized

Congress took cognizance of the matter in 1926. By an act approved on March 12 (Public Law 45- 69th Congress), the Secretary of War was authorized to sell 43 surplus military reservations, among them Forts Dade and De Soto.⁷⁷ State, county and municipal authorities declined to exercise an option to purchase De Soto at the appraised price of \$192,000; consequently the reservation was offered for sale, in six tracts, by sealed bid to be opened on April 16, 1928. Only two bids were received; both were rejected.⁷⁸

On August 28, 1929, Fort De Soto was "permanently withdrawn" from sale on the grounds that it was required for coast defense purposes.⁷⁹ A board of officers, appointed two years later to pass on the post's usefulness,

⁷⁶ Inspection report by Col. H. S. Wagner, Insp., February 3, 1930; inspection report by Col. C. A. Bach, Insp. Gen., February 6, 1931. (Decimal File 333.1, Fort Dade.) RG 92.

⁷⁷ War Department Bulletin 4, 1926, bound in War Department, General Orders and Bulletins, 1926 (Washington, 1927).

⁷⁸ Assistant Quartermaster General to The Adjutant General, February 17, 1930 (Decimal File 602.6, C-R, Fort De Soto). RG 92. A similar experience was encountered in the attempted sale of Fort Dade on the same day; draft letter from Secretary of War to Secretary of the Treasury, August 9, 1928 (Decimal File 680.44, Fort Dade). RG 94.

⁷⁹ Assistant Quartermaster General to The Adjutant General, February 17, 1930 (Decimal File 602.6, C-R, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

recommended on June 24, 1931, that the fort be abandoned by the Army and the property transferred to some other agency.⁸⁰

Migratory Bird Refuge

The Federal Real Estate Board on September 10, 1931, informed the Department of Agriculture that the War Department had requested clearance to dispose of the two forts and asked if either was desired for use as a migratory bird refuge. After examination, the Secretary of Agriculture decided that Fort De Soto would be suitable for such use. The Secretary of War then offered to transfer all of the Fort De Soto reservation except Mullet Island, since the City of St. Petersburg had indicated a desire for that portion. On May 9, 1932, a bill (S-4715) was introduced in Congress to authorize the transfer.⁸¹

That bill and several successors failed to pass, but on November 15, 1935, the War Department issued a permit by which the islands of North Mullet, Hospital, East Mullet, Rattlesnake and Center Mullet were used as a bird refuge. The transfer finally was effected, under the provisions of an Act of April 26, 1938 (Public Law 494-75th Congress), on November 10 of that year.⁸²

⁸⁰ Report of Board of Officers, June 24, 1931 (Decimal File 602.2, Fort Dade, Vol. III). RG 92.

⁸¹ Memorandum re Fort De Soto, Fla., April 26, 1935, in Fort De Soto file, Branch of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior Building.

⁸² Secretary of War H. H. Woodring to Secretary of Agriculture, November 10, 1938; copy in Fort De Soto file, Branch of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service. On May 9, 1939, the Bureau of Biological Survey, which administered migratory bird refuges, was transferred to the Department of the Interior.

Negotiations with St. Petersburg for the sale of the west end of Mullet Island were unavailing during this period. On June 20, 1935, Representative J. Hardin Peterson informed the Secretary of War that St. Petersburg wanted to negotiate a 99-year lease at a nominal rental, but he was informed that only a five-year revocable lease could be made.⁸³

Abandonment of Quarantine Station

For a decade and a half after the abandonment of Fort De Soto, the Mullet Key Quarantine Station continued to function, under the auspices of the Public Health Service.⁸⁴ It was the center of Tampa Bay quarantine activities and, except for a few months in late 1922 and early 1923, of the inspection of aliens aboard vessels from foreign ports.⁸⁵ The physical plant for these activities in 1925 consisted of 15 buildings.⁸⁶

The station was well located with regard to its function, but the site had serious drawbacks. Most notable among them were its isolation and its "hordes of pestiferous mosquitoes."⁸⁷ The mosquito problem apparently

⁸³ Secretary of War to Representative J. Hardin Peterson, July 1, 1935 (Decimal File 608.41, Fort De Soto). RG 92.

⁸⁴ By an Act of July 1, 1902, the name of the agency was changed from Marine Hospital Service to Public Health and Marine Hospital Service, and in August, 1912, it received its present name.

⁸⁵ Asst. Surg. Gen. J. W. Kerr to The Surgeon General, March 6, 1923 (Domestic Stations, Florida, Tampa Bay Quarantine, 1850-95). Record Group 90 (Public Health Service), National Archives.

⁸⁶ Surgeon-Director John McMullen, District No. 4, to the Surgeon General, May 27, 1925 (Domestic Stations, Florida, Tampa Bay Quarantine, 1850-95). RG 90.

⁸⁷ W. E. A. Wyman, president of the Florida Anti-Mosquito Association, to the Secretary of War, September 9, 1927 (Decimal File 725.11, Fort Dade). RG 92.

had abated not a whit since the days of misery suffered by the Fort De Soto garrison. The insects forced the Public Health Service personnel indoors each summer, and by 1927 "countless clouds" of mosquitoes from Mullet Key were being carried by high winds to plague the communities of St. Petersburg, Bradenton and Sarasota.⁸⁸ The mosquitoes were breeding on the Army's portion of Mullet Island, and in 1933 the Public Health Service was given permission to undertake mosquito eradication work there, which soon disposed of that nuisance.⁸⁹

The isolation problem was alleviated somewhat in 1930 when the Coast Guard laid a cable from Egmont via Mullet Key to the mainland to give direct telephone service to St. Petersburg.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the Mullet Key Quarantine Station was closed early in 1937, when all Public Health Service quarantine and relief activities for Tampa Bay were concentrated in a new station at Gadsden Point, near Tampa.⁹¹ On September 29, 1938, the 27-acre tract was sold to the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners, the county taking possession on October 10.⁹²

⁸⁸ B. M. Latham, president of the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce, to Senator Park Trammel, August 25, 1927 (Decimal File 725.11, Fort Dade). RG 92.

⁸⁹ Representative J. Hardin Peterson to the Secretary of War, September 12, 1933; Secretary of War to Secretary of the Treasury, October 11, 1933 (Decimal File 725.11, Fort Dade). RG 92.

⁹⁰ Annual Report by Surgeon J. T. Burkhalter for the Fiscal Year 1930 (Domestic Stations, Florida, Tampa Bay Quarantine, 1850-15). RG 90.

⁹¹ Annual Report of Acting Assistant Surgeon Fleetwood Gruver to The Surgeon General for the Fiscal Year 1937 (General Classified Records, Group I, Domestic Stations, 1936-1944, Tampa Quarantine, 1850-15). RG 90.

⁹² Chief, Section of Space Control, Treasury Department, to The Surgeon General, October 1, 1938; Acting Assistant Surgeon Douglas G. Meighen to Director of Procurement, October 11, 1938 (General Classified Records, Group I, Domestic Stations, Tampa Quarantine, 1960). RG 90.

World War II and After

With the beginnings of American mobilization in mid-1940, the War Department decided upon the utilization of Mullet Key as a bombing range. In October of that year the Army began negotiating with the Department of the Interior and Pinellas County for the return of their respective holdings.⁹³ While negotiations were still in progress, Fort De Soto was designated a sub-post of nearby MacDill Field, on March 22, 1941.⁹⁴ The Interior Department tract was turned back to the War Department on April 8, Pinellas County sold its portion on June 23, and the former Fort De Soto Military Reservation became the Mullet Key Bombing Range.⁹⁵

Becoming surplus to military needs once again when the war ended, Mullet Key was sold to Pinellas County on August 11, 1948, under the provisions of Public Law 666 - 80th Congress, which had been approved on June 17.⁹⁶ The formal ceremonies were held on September 8.⁹⁷

⁹³ Memorandum of Ira N. Gabrielson, Director, Division of Wildlife Refuges, to Mr. Dieffenbach, October 28, 1940; in Fort De Soto file, Branch of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior Building.

⁹⁴ Memorandum of The Adjutant General to Commanding General, Fourth Corps Area, 22 March 1941 (Decimal File 601.4). RG 94. Copy in National Survey files, Region One, National Park Service.

⁹⁵ Acting Secretary of the Interior A. J. Wirtz to Secretary of War, April 8, 1941; in Fort De Soto file, Branch of Wildlife Refuges, Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior Building. Decision by Marion Clawson, Director, Bureau of Land Management, August 11, 1948 (BLM Miscellaneous File No. 33623). RG 49. The purchase price from the county was \$18,404.54.

⁹⁶ The purchase price was \$26,495.54, representing full price paid to the county for its holding in 1941, and one-half the appraised value of the remainder. Ibid. The northwest tip of North Mullet Island, inadvertently omitted from this sale, was sold for \$11.25 under the provisions of Public Law 46 - 81st Congress, approved on April 19, 1949. Order for Patent Section by Associate Director Powell Bell, Bureau of Land Management, March 29, 1950 (BLM Miscellaneous File No. 33623). RG 49.

⁹⁷ Supt. C. R. Vinten, Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, to Clawson, September 10, 1948 (BLM Miscellaneous File No. 33623). RG 49.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Although published works supply a great deal of information on the concept of national defense which spawned Fort De Soto, little is in print concerning the post itself. It was necessary to go to the voluminous public records in the National Archives in order to piece together the story of Fort De Soto.

The most valuable sources of information for this study were the following record groups in the National Archives: Record Group 22, United States Fish and Wildlife Service; Record Group 49, General Land Office; Record Group 77, Office of the Chief of Engineers; Record Group 90, Public Health Service; Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General; and Record Group 94, Adjutant General's Office.

Additional information on Fort De Soto may be found in the following record groups: Record Group 18, Army Air Forces; Record Group 107, Office of the Secretary of War; Record Group 153, Office of the Judge Advocate General (War); Record Group 156, Office of the Chief of Ordnance; Record Group 159, Office of the Inspector General; Record Group 168, National Guard Bureau; and Record Group 177, Offices of the Chiefs of Arms.

Frank B. Sarles, Jr.
Frank B. Sarles, Jr.
Historian

Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla.

GENERAL PLAN AND REAR ELEVATION OF BATTERY OF EIGHT TWELVE-INCH MORTARS ON MULLET KEY FLA

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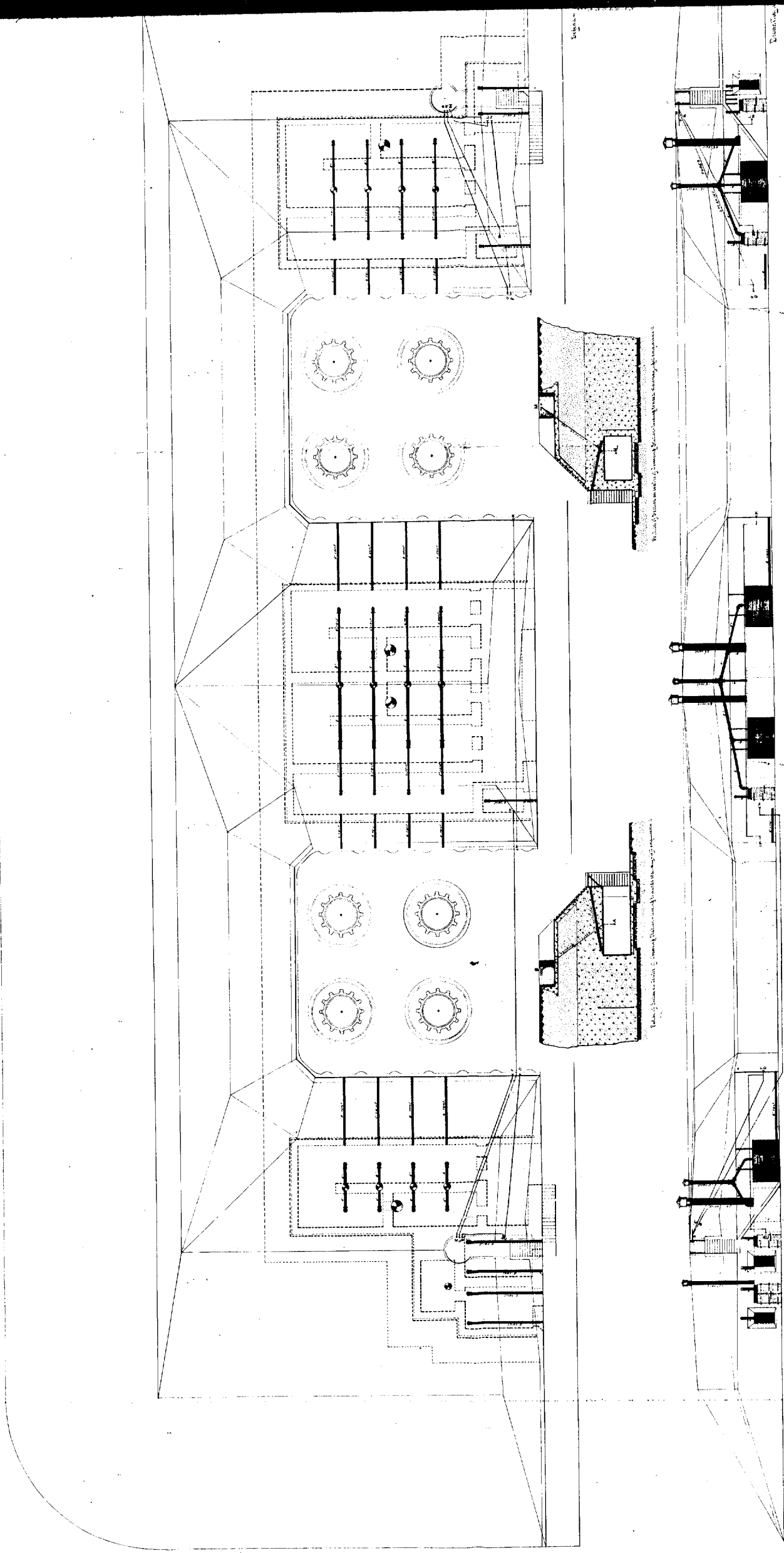
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Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla.

GENERAL PLAN AND REAR ELEVATION OF BATTERY OF EIGHT TWELVE-INCH MORTARS ON MULLET KEY FLA

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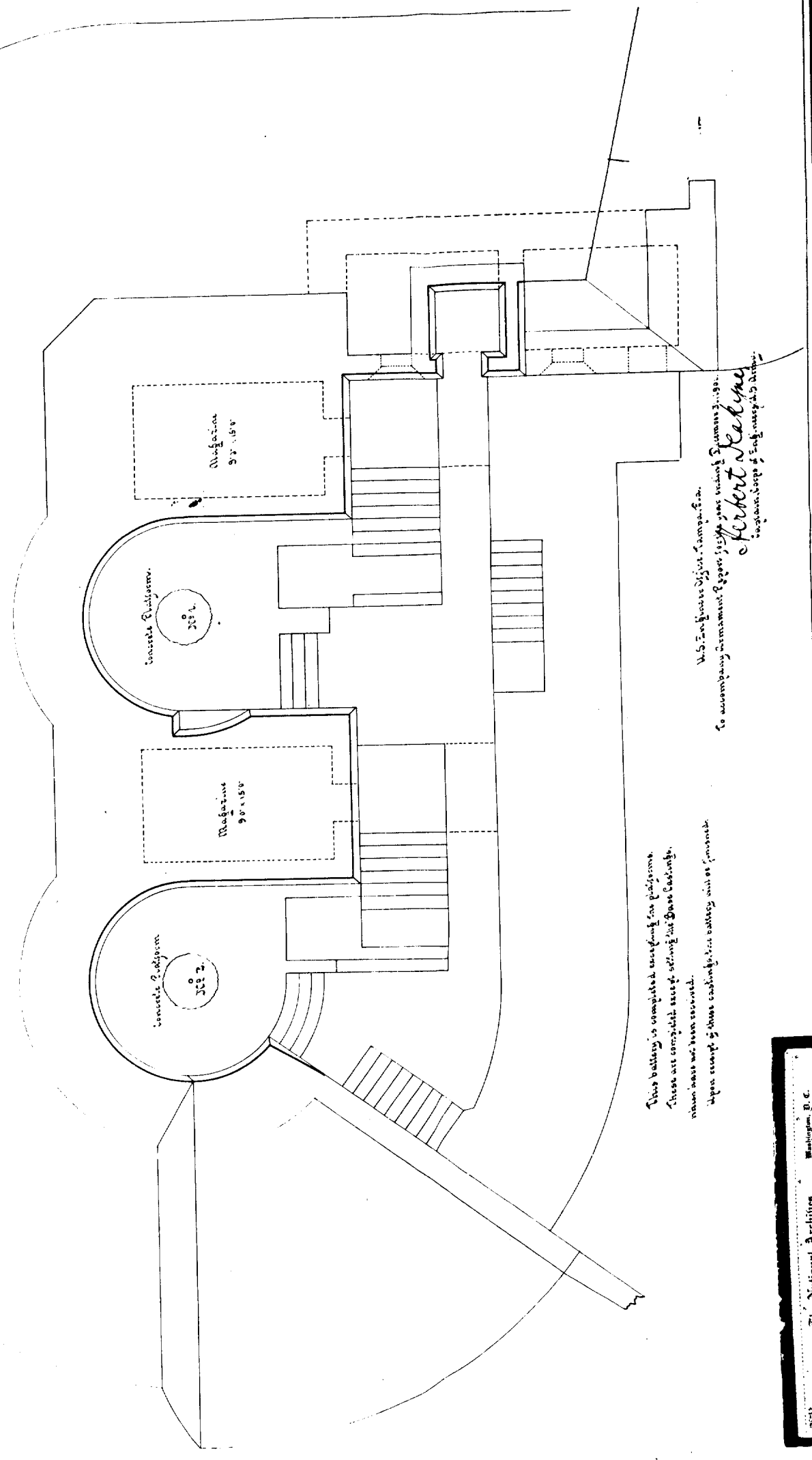
and

and

Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla.

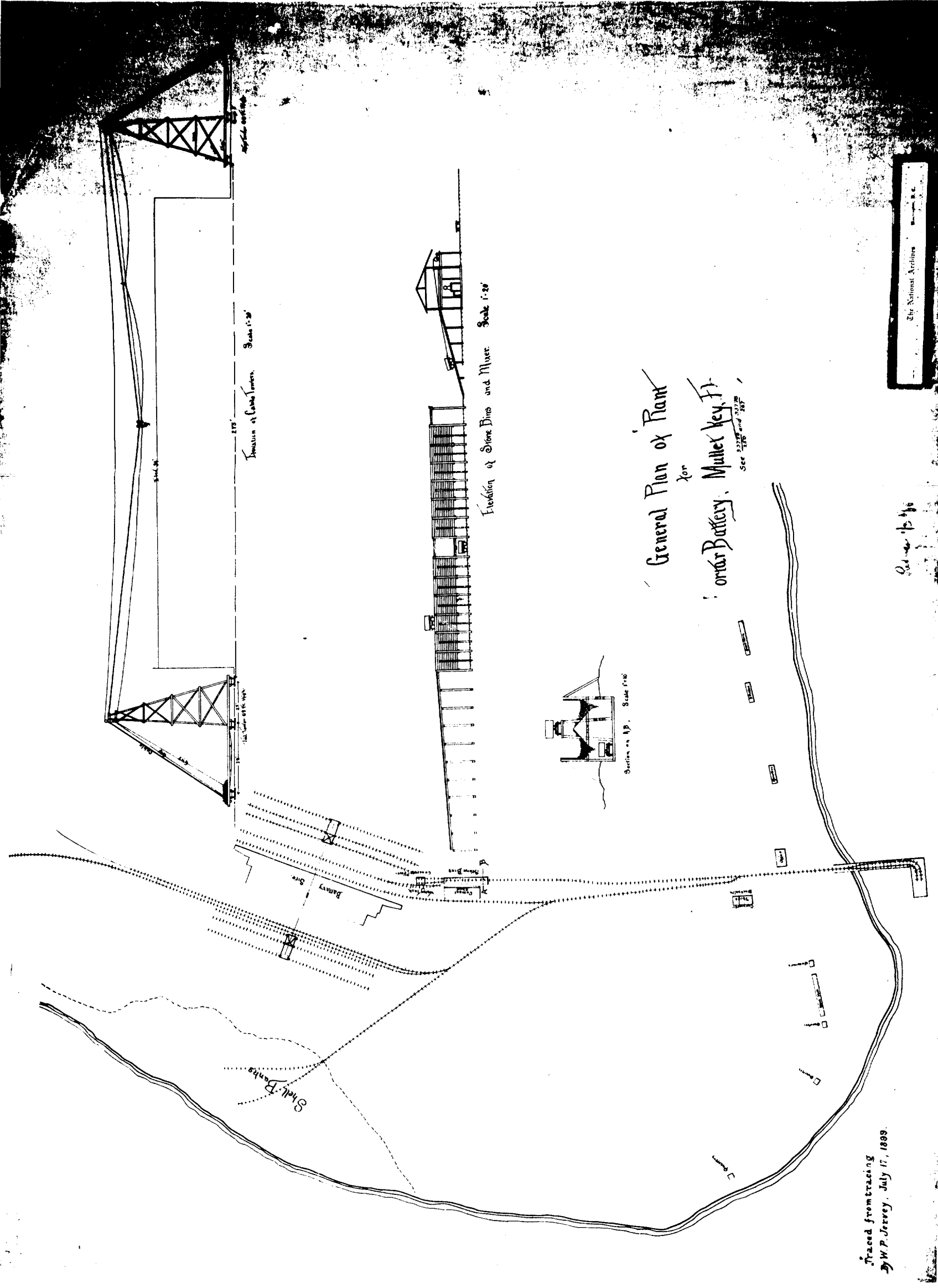
/ BATTERY OF TWO 15-PDR. R. F. GUNS ON BALANCED PILLAR MOUNT.

AT
FORT DE SOTO, FLA.
Scale: 1 in. = 5 ft.



This battery is completed except for pillars.
These are complete except setting the guns.
When work has been started.
Upon receipt of these conditions the battery will be complete.

U.S. Engineer Office, Tampa, Fla.
To accompany statement of work, dated January 2, 1901.
Herbert Stearns
Captain, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army.



44051
E
2

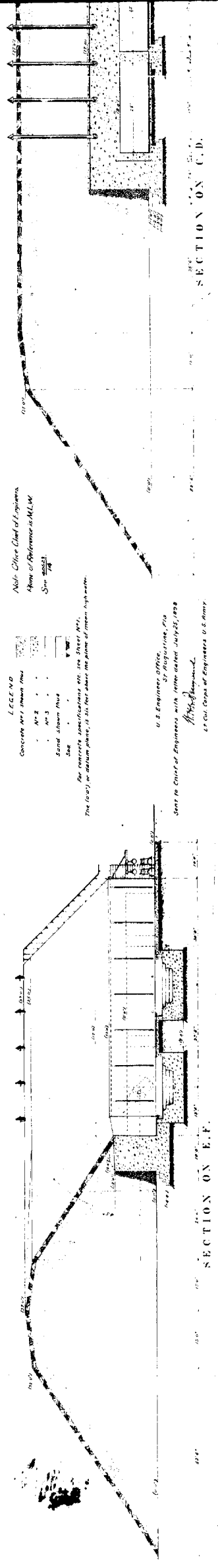
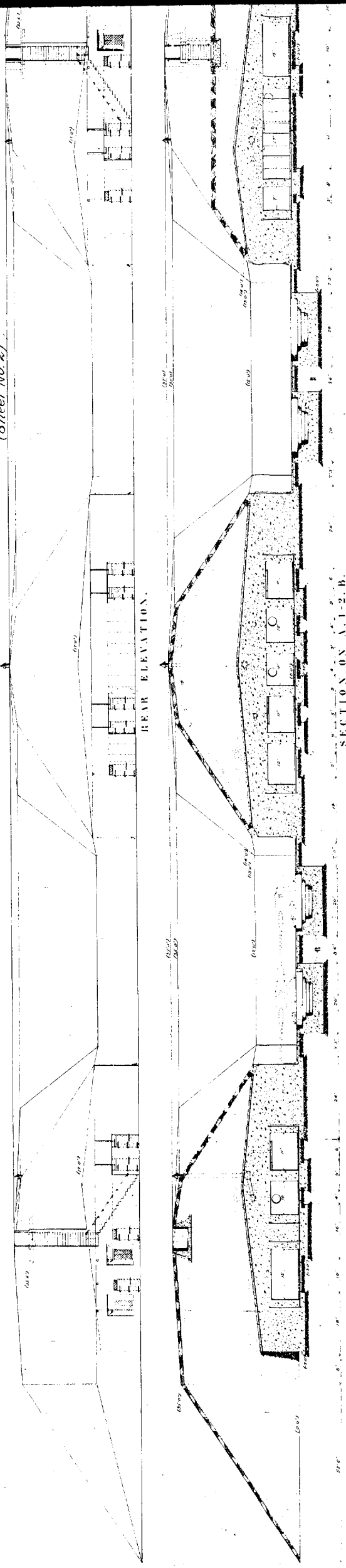
Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla.

Elevation and Cross Section s of 12 inch Mortar Battery at Mullet Key, Fla.

(Sheet No. 2)

Scale 1 in = 10 ft.

See 2275 and 2276



LEGEND
Concrete and stone masonry
No. 1
No. 2
No. 3
Sand shown true
See
The concrete specifications are on Sheet No. 1.
The (100) or datum plane, is the first above the plane of mean high water.

U.S. Engineer Office,
St. Augustine, Fla.
Sent to Chief of Engineers with same dated July 21, 1908
W. H. Hammond,
1st Col. Corps of Engineers U.S. Army

PART 2

Defenses of Tampa Bay, Fla.

General plan of Emplacement for 8-12 inch mortars in battery

at Mullet Key, Fla.

Scale 1 in. = 10 ft.

Use 3112 and 3113

(Sheet No 1)

Planned and drawn under direction of
Lieut. Col. M. H. Berry
in Conn.

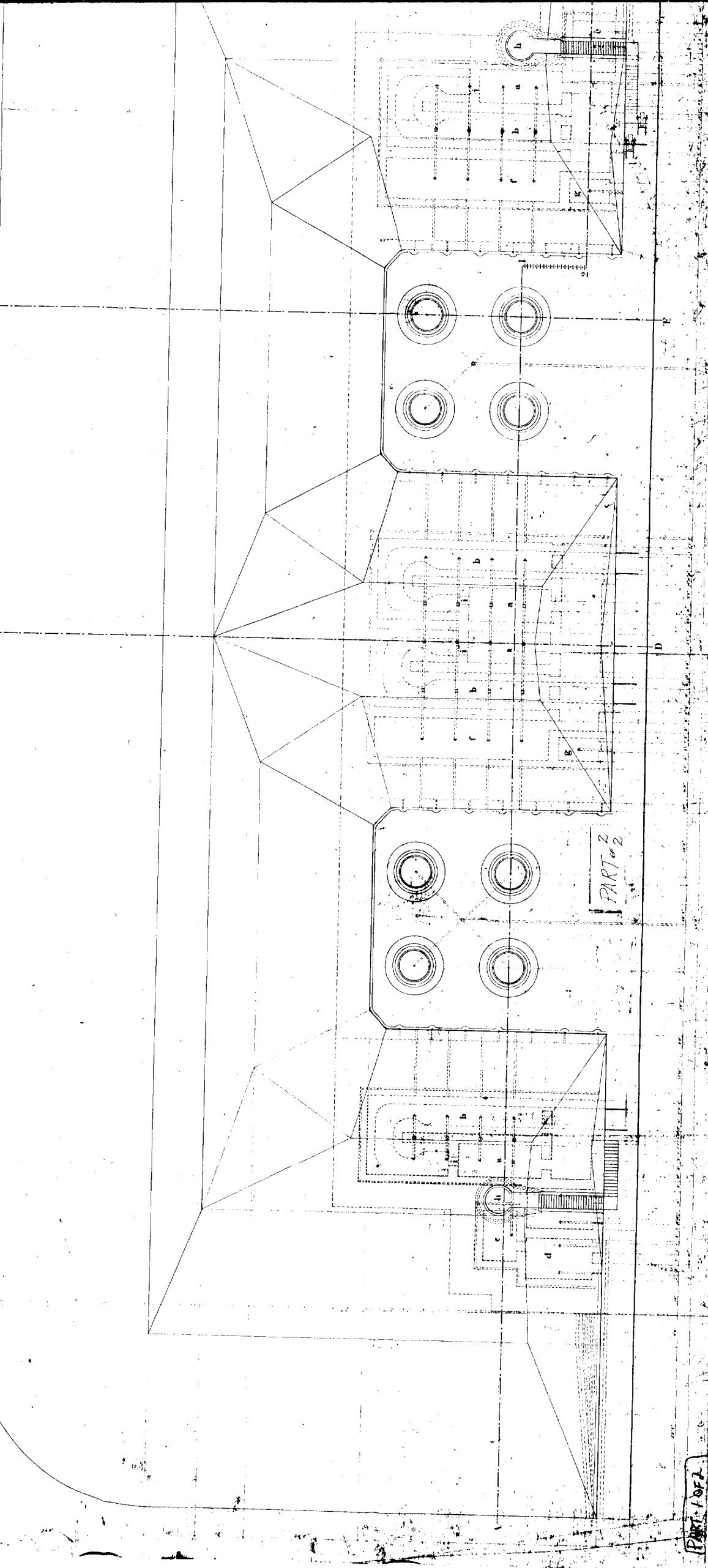
U.S. Engineer Office, St. Augustine, Fla.
To accompany Order dated July 21, 1915
Approved: *[Signature]*
Lt. Col. J. H. Berry, U.S. Army.

LEGEND

Emplacements and other structures subject to wear and tear are indicated on this plan for a length of 10 years with necessary repairs. All structures are shown with their original dimensions. All other structures are shown with their original dimensions. All structures are shown with their original dimensions. All structures are shown with their original dimensions.

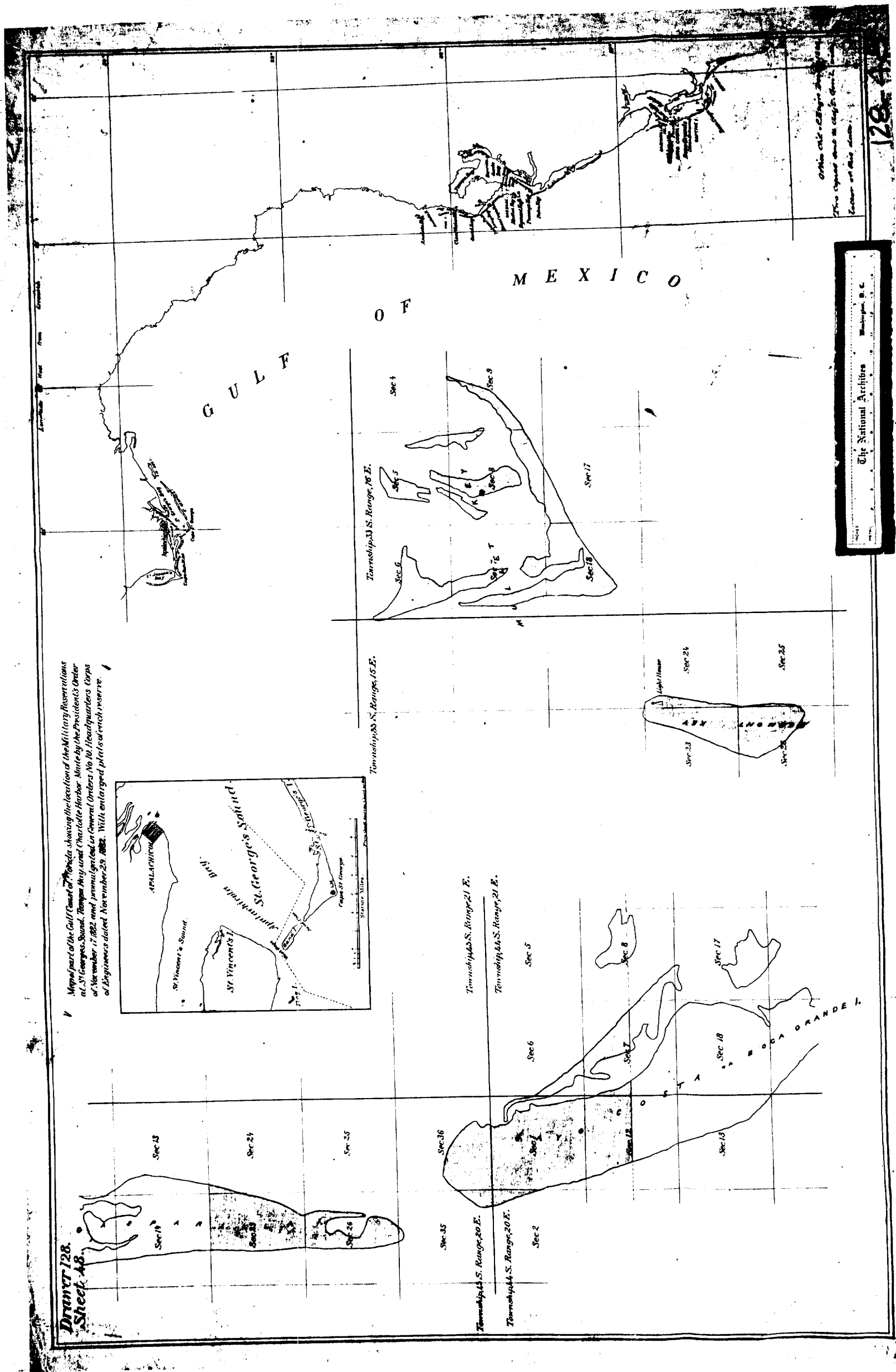
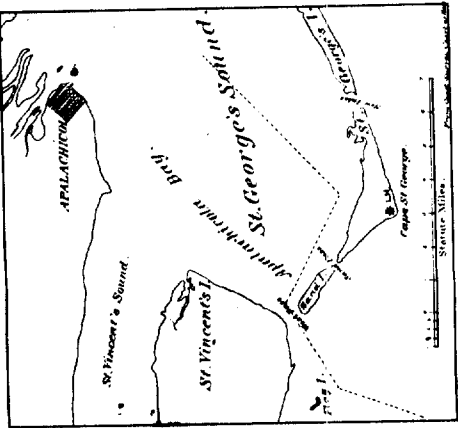
Proposed structures of concrete
Proposed structures of masonry
Proposed structures of steel
Proposed structures of other materials

Proposed structures of concrete
Proposed structures of masonry
Proposed structures of steel
Proposed structures of other materials



Drainage 128.
Sheet 48.

Map of part of the Gulf Coast of Florida showing the location of the Military Reservations at St. George's Sound, Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor. Made by the President's Order of November 17, 1882 and promulgated in General Order No. 10. Headquarters Corps of Engineers dated November 29, 1882. With enlarged plat of each reserve.



*Drawer 128.
Sheet 13.*

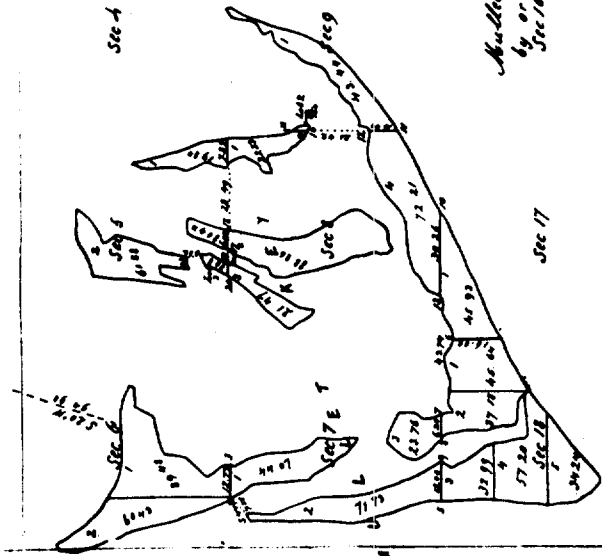
Received with Mrs. Gentry letter of March 2, 1877.

TOWNSHIP N: 33 SOUTH

MERIDIAN
 Duplicate filed in Register Office Mar 4 1877
 Commenced Jan'y 17th 1876
 Completed Jan'y 21st

MERIDIAN

Report 30756^B



Multitasking removed for military purposes March 23 1949
by order of Secretary of War
Sec 16 Sec 14 Sec 15

[illegible]

121
Total number of Acres 842.29

Survey Designated	By Whom Surveyed	Date of Survey	Amount of Survey	When Surveyed
Township lines			24 3/4 3/4	January
Subdivisions			1 62 52	17th to 21st
Mean dir			21 12 63	1826
Triangulations			1 63 64	

The above Mr. of Frontier No 33 South of Chicago - 1910 East of the
Principal Indian Service is actually confined to the field
work of every Sheriff in fit on the office which have been assigned and approved
He, Ray & Wall
Sawyer General Office
Buffalo, N.Y.
17th Feb 1910
Sawyer Genl